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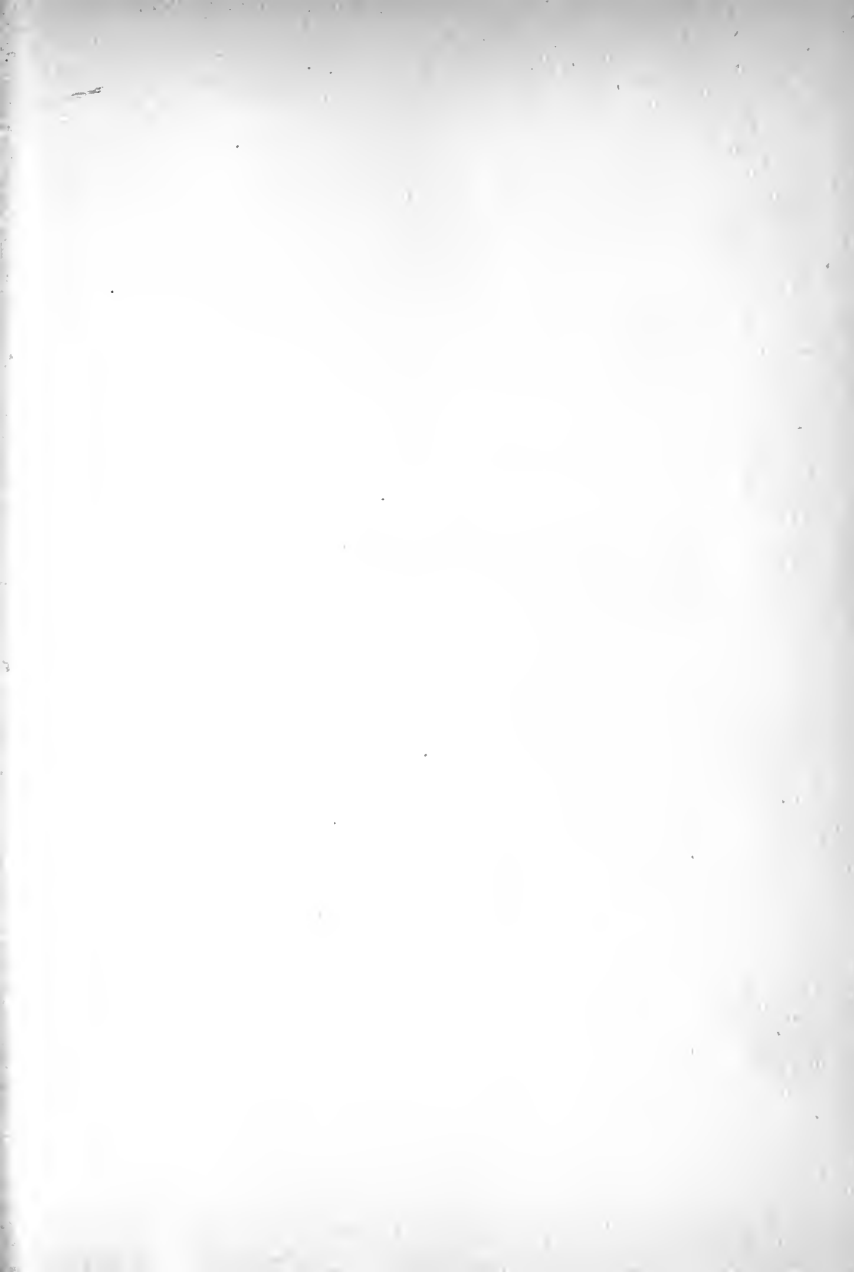
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THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

By the Same Author

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(postage 10 cents)

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MOFFAT, YARD & Co., PUBLISHERS
31 East 17th St., New York

THE
MAID'S FORGIVENESS
A play

BY
JOHN JAY CHAPMAN



NEW YORK
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1908

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SCENE

THE CASTLE OF MINNEBERG

*Somewhere near the Ardennes and the Rhine
in about the year 1120*

ACT I

SCENE 1. A Room in the Castle

SCENE 2. The King's Chamber

SCENE 3. The Courtyard

ACT II

SCENE 1. The Queen's Chamber

SCENE 2. On the Ramparts. Afternoon

SCENE 3. The Same. Moonlight

ACT III

SCENE 1. A Room in the Castle

SCENE 2. The Banquet-Hall

CHARACTERS

KING SIGMUND.

WOLFRAM, *his son.*

GASTON, *his adopted son.*

PHARAMOND, *an old minstrel.*

HINCMAR, *doctor to the King.*

PRINCE ÆGIDIUS, *Knight of the Holy Roman Empire, special
Commissioner of Justice.*

BREVARIUS and ARNOLFO, *doctors of law.*

OSWALD, *Captain of the Guard.*

GERARD, *servant to Pharamond.*

MARTIN, *servant to Hincmar.*

HILDEBRAND, *an old soldier.*

EPHRAIM, *an old servant.*

DIEDRICK and HANS, *servants.*

BERNHARD and OTTO, *peasants.*

QUEEN MARGARET.

ELFRIDA, *niece to the Queen.*

HEDWIG, *an old servant of the Queen's.*

HILDA, *a maid.*

*Soldiers, Servants, Clerks, Officers of Justice, Court Attendants,
and Peasants.*

ACT I

SCENE FIRST

A ROOM IN THE CASTLE

Queen and Gaston.

QUEEN. Be not surprised that I have sent for thee.
Queens wear some jewelled sorrows in their heart
More dear than those that glitter on their brow.
Gaston, thou art my Wolfram's second self,
And from his infancy hast been his friend.
Tell me, what makes my son avoid my sight?
This is his birthday; yet he greets me not.
I scarcely see him, but he slinks away
Behind a barely civil "By your leave,"
Leaving a glance I do not like to name;
But, should I meet it in another eye,
I could but call it hatred.

Gaston. Nay, dear madam,
It is not hatred. 'Tis a kind of mood
Where many cloudy elements commingle;
It is the anguish of deep-thoughted youth
That swells in the pod. Thy Wolfram is a saint;
But a young eagle too, all claws and beak.
It frets him that the world must make a king

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Of him, who counts himself but as a soul
Pursuing truth. At times it angers him
That your ambition should take sides with the world
Against his soul. It greatly angers him
To find himself impinioned in the flesh
And not disincorporate in the universe,
A spirit merely. Half in jest I speak,
Yet much in earnest. Youth is full of pain.
Believe me, Wolfram loves your majesty.
Another cause downcasts him:
The long-continued illness of the king
Doth shed a natural gloom about the court;
And being sensitive, and very young,
He catches some infection in the air.
A change of air may cure him. Give me leave
To take him for a month of careless travel.
We shall be back before the lanes are green,
And bring in summer with us when we come.

Queen. It is too long. You must not leave the court;
I cannot want you for so long a time.
You must not leave me. Truly, till you spoke
I did not know I, too, was something touched.
Tell me of the king.
He has immured himself, and from his room
He issues orders that disquiet me.

ACT FIRST

Gaston. Have you not heard? The king dismisses
all,

Retaining Hincmar as his only friend.

The rest, he says, conspire against his life.

Queen. Hincmar, the learned doctor?

Gaston.

Doctor, madam!

'Tis a Bavarian astrologer,

Who travelled hither counselled by the stars,

Led by the fame of royal malady.

Queen. Indeed, I do remember his arrival.

Gaston. Yes, this intriguing adept travels here,

Chimes his exact arrival with the stroke

When sick men turn to magic in despair.

Lifting a rod of personality

Over a nature troubled to its depths,

He makes himself the master. No man may

Have audience except on his prescription.

Queen. I fear the prince may find himself denied

On his petition to absent himself,

So close a vigilance begins to fall

On every act and happening in the castle.

Elfrida, my sweet niece, is turned away,

Her zither in her hand.

Gaston.

Elfrida too?

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Who with her music soothed his griefs to sleep,
That he would send for her to comfort him.

Queen. I found her sitting in the anteroom,
Her heart and instrument alike unstrung,
Weeping alone. This cannot be endured.
Gaston, the prince and you must leave at once.
Depart at eventide and secretly.
Some fearful power begins to operate
Which I have long awaited inwardly.
The king's mind crumbles; and his towered strength
Topples to ruin, while my Wolfram's eyes
Glass the oncoming storm.
Myself have naught to dread, though flesh and blood
Dreads the unknown. This sickness of the king's
Began ere I was married. He was then
Upon the great Crusade, companioning
Godfrey de Bouillon to the sepulchre.
But dost thou know these things?

Gaston. I know the king, in following a vow—

Queen. A vow he ne'er fulfilled! The messengers
Announcing his succession to the throne
Found him at Wittelsbach, and he returned
To make our marriage; leaving, as they said,
More than his vow behind.
Gaston, we princes have few confidants.

ACT FIRST

Dost thou know more?

Gaston. Your majesty may guess
That the affairs of kings are talked about,
The love affairs not least. I give my thoughts
No licence to pursue such gossiping.

Queen. Gaston, what dost thou know?

Gaston. I know there was
A rumour that beclouded his return,
Of some stray maid, or princess he had won,—
Some say had married,—in the Orient.

Queen. Never had married, Gaston!—married never!
A Swabian peasant, or Bavarian girl,
Whose name and claim deserved no memory,
Save such as clings to a deserved regret
For passing error.

Gaston. It is well, my liege.

Queen. And yet his conscience and his broken vow,
The glory of his friends, who left their lives
Along the Danube, or who brought them back
Baptized in fame above the reach of death,
Turned to his torture; and in all the grief,
A figure of forsaken womanhood
Still held the virgin's place. Mark you, I speak
Of things no mortal agony could draw

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

The mention of, nor ever has, either to him
Or others,—things I saw, felt, lived,
Year after year in this imprisoned place.
Now is my husband dead, and I may speak,—
Dead to all purpose.

Gaston. Lady, what you say
Raises a mirror in my memory,
And wakes a sleeping serpent of suspicion.
What if this doctor practise on the king
Some ugly cunning, holding over him
The knowledge of this early mystery?
What if, with drugs or charms, he terrorize
To break the hinges of the kingly mind
And get control of the castle? 'T is a guess.
More I'll not call it, lest we run ahead
And make the bed for sorrow.

Queen. But this is horrible!

Gaston. Madam, for all our sakes, control yourself.
Speak not so loud. These mortised corridors
Carry a sound and will not let it die.
Whispers have echoed here, to be revoiced,
After a thousand bouts, in cries of pain.

Queen. But we must take some action!

Gaston. Act we must,

ACT FIRST

But not upon the impulse. Think, dear madam;
Against the undisclosed powers of evil,
Action is impotence. We may be wrong,—
We all are overstrained and querulous.
And as for Wolfram's rudeness—
Be with me, madam, when I meet him next;
And if he show a peevish disposition,
I'll find occasion to be frank with him.
Walk in the courtyard half an hour from now;
It is a haunt he loves; I'll join you both.

Queen. Indeed it is the dearest wish I own
To come more near my son. I will attend you.

Enter Ephraim and speaks to Gaston in dumb-show.

Gaston (to Queen). Your majesty remembers that friend of the king's boyhood, Pharamond, who was bred up here in this castle and was to have been a warrior, but that nature, who had made him a poet, showed her hand, and he became a minstrel? But all this was before your majesty's marriage, I think.

Queen. Pharamond! Why that name to me is a picture of my husband's youth. I never saw him; and yet he is a part of my mind.

Gaston. Well, madam, he has returned to greet us to-day. Some of your majesty's people met him in the

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

village and the old ones gave him a great welcome. I saw him singing to them.

Queen. We will receive him at the birthday feast. Ephraim, bid them prepare a place for Pharamond.

SCENE SECOND

THE KING'S CHAMBER

The King seated, Hincmar standing.

HINCMAR. I greatly fear he may prove one of them;
And till our doubts are settled, 'tis as well
To watch him closely.

King. Pharamond, a spy!
He was the earliest, loving'st friend I had.

Hincmar. I say not he is certainly a spy;
But that his coming falls most strangely in
With all the plot we know to be on foot
Against your kingdom and the prince your son.
Have we not found them for some months at work
In Mainz, which is a hot-bed of cabal:
A secret-scheming band of courtiers
And politicians, heeled by men of law,
Whose aim and purpose is—God save our souls!—
To wrench this kingdom from its lawful line,

ACT FIRST

And get it for themselves? They find a flaw
Warping your prince's title, a disease
Beclouding your clear mind; and both defects
Are made the pretext for a regency.
Your majesty has seen the proofs of this.
Now, in the hour when we expect from Mainz
Some emissary from our enemies,
From Mainz there comes an early boyhood's friend
(Who has not, be it said, shown much devotion
During the years between) whose age and speech
Make him the man our news anticipates,
Predict him to a dot. I like it not.

King. But what, good Hincmar, could he wish of me?

Hincmar. Wish! Praise the Lord for such dear innocence!

Why, they need evidence to found their suit.
They go to wrack in search of evidence
Of your first marriage.

King. Hincmar, there is none.

Hincmar. There must be some; and they would fish it out,

Using this Pharamond as a likely hook.

King. Thou art my friend, and I have told thee all.
For in the telling there was much relief;

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

And in th' off-putting of my worldly cares
On thy strong shoulders, infinite comfort, Hincmar.
Yet are there thoughts that I have told thee not.
Thou 'lt not betray me?—ah, I know thou 'lt not.

Hincmar. What thoughts, my liege? I would not
urge myself

As a confessor to your majesty;
Yet would not thwart a motion of your soul,
Feeling it noble. Many griefs take flight
Even in the telling. For my loyalty,
If this be not established by the past,
Protest were idle. Use me as you will.

King. I know not if seclusion bring remorse,
Or if remorse, seclusion; but I know
Some power is seeking me. I ward it off;
Yet comes the knock and finds me powerless.
Nightly I wake in terror,—find myself
Standing in darkness on the parapet
And calling Adelaide. She walks in me,
Smiting the depths beneath the reach of sleep
With old enchantment. Is the past not past,
That the lost chapters of the soul return
To cast a question on the actual?

Hincmar. This does great credit to your highness'
heart;

ACT FIRST

Yet am I glad some trusty friend is by
To guide you through the mazes of the world;
For this is fantasy.

King. Was the sin greater that I married her?—
That on this marriage hinges all my thought,
Drawing damnation from an act of virtue?
Her gentleness demanded nothing of me,
Her unreproachful nature made no claim;
Yet now, with twenty years between the act,
The reclamation of her silent grief
O'ertakes my soul and grips it by the hand.

Hincmar. Nay, nay, your highness takes too much
to heart

An ancient error; and I blame myself
For having waked the anguish of a soul
So tender. All is past and done,
And, as you say, unprovable.

King. I see a doubled presence in my house.
Her figure mingles with the sequent years
Of my o'erlapping marriage with the queen,
And bids me claim her. Did we not stand up
Before the altar in the pilgrims' church
While the dawn broke o'er green Bavaria?
Then did we kneel together by each shrine
That leads the mountain peasant to the cross,

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Making our pilgrimage. 'Tis long ago;
Yet it assails me, Hincmar, in the night.

Hincmar. All you have said
Raises my reverence for your highness' soul,
Even to the pitch of worship. Yet I must
Remind you that all this cannot be proved.

King. Save by confession, Hincmar,—by confession.

Thou understandest not. The power within me
Calls for a proclamation of my sin.

Hincmar. A proclamation from a penitent king!
A public penance!—Stay, your majesty;
Give me a moment to collect my thoughts.
The maid is dead; the circumstance is past,
Yet burns in the conscience. It will make you great,
And sanctify the sickness of these years,
Which dims your character before the world.
A public penance! 'Tis a blessed thought.
I think, your majesty, I may advise it;
But give me time to think.

King. 'Tis what we need:
Time to be patient with our obstinate thoughts.
The quietude you brought me saves my life.
Yet do I need more air. Good friend, bethink you.
Get me an hour or two beneath the stars.

ACT FIRST

Hincmar. My very thought. To-night I'll change
the watch

And leave the western ramp in solitude,
Where you may walk and breathe your thoughts
towards God

As in an oratory. But we must observe
Our regimen. 'Tis almost five.

The setting sun sheds peace across the world
And bids you rest. I fear me I must have
Your signature to Pharamond's arrest.

'Tis but a line. (*Places a paper on the table.*)

King. Dost thou assure me this is necessary?

Hincmar. Not only so, my lord, but very wise.
He shall be safely lodged, with no constraint
Except some circumscription in his walks.
And all the household shall be satisfied.
'Tis putting him where he can do no harm
Till our suspicion vanish.

(*The King is bending over the paper reluctantly.*
Hincmar continues, aside:)

This Pharamond
Has somehow gained a knowledge of our plot
And comes, my cipher says, to warn the king.
It is a desperate action to arrest him,—
But necessary.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

(*To King.*) Yes, your highness, necessary.

(*King signs. Hincmar touches a bell. Enter Oswald. Hincmar places the paper in Oswald's hands and points to the signature, saying to Oswald:*)

His majesty desires that when I give
The word you do obey it.

[*Oswald looks first at the paper and then towards the King; bows and exit.*

King.

Thanks, good Hincmar;

Thank you enough I cannot, for the zeal
That you have shown herein and everywhere.

Hincmar. To rest, good king; and may God comfort you. [Exit King.]

It *must* be by confession, since no proof
Of this clandestine marriage can be had;
Though proofs are ample that a child was born,
Of which the king knows nothing. Prove this marriage,
And throw the kingdom into chancery:
Establish a long quest to find the heir,
Or prove him lost, and in the interim
I to be regent. So the Archbishop promised;
And I have means to hold him to his word.

ACT FIRST

SCENE THIRD

THE COURTYARD

The Queen, Elfrida, Bernhard, Otto, and three or four Peasants and Peasant Women. Bernhard has a large bundle of MS. in his hand and Otto a big offering of flowers.

QUEEN. I suppose, Elfrida, that it is to celebrate Wolfram's birthday that these good people have come.

Elfrida. Yes, your majesty. Otto brings the first flowers of spring, and Bernhard the last fruits of his muse. I could not keep them out.

Queen (to peasants). I thank you all, for myself and for the prince.

Bernhard. Rough things, your majesty, but from the heart. It is only a sort of rhymed prophecy that came to me as I was lying abed. It is called "A Loyal Offering; or, The Humble Devotion of Many Hearts. Being some few Verses in Praise of a Great Heir to a Great Kingdom; and Signifying what may be Expected from"—

Otto. You should never have put that part in. Who are you to teach the prince what he should be?

Bernhard. Why, that is the very poetry of the whole,—the apotheose,—the praising and prophesying

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

part. But indeed the poem has two parts, your majesty. When the opening part closes, the closing part opens, and then—

Otto (to Elfrida). The flowers will wilt before he has finished, my lady.

Queen. We will hear them immediately. And here comes the prince.

Enter Wolfram.

Wolfram, it is thy birthday; and these good people have come with their offerings to grace the day. And I have other great news for thee. Pharamond, the old singer, has come to pay us a visit,—your father's friend Pharamond.

Wolfram. There must always be singing. Good morning, mother. If you shut it off in the parlor, it will resort in a body to the kitchen. As for kings and queens, they have their pleasures too,—fighting and the killing of harmless animals; family pride and the pushing of boundaries. Perhaps, if we knew all, we should be glad there was singing somewhere. What say you, mother?

Queen. Why, my son, I am glad. It is not given to man to be merry always; and yet must we welcome the singer.

ACT FIRST

Wolfram. See now, mother, how custom rules you in all things. You would have me greet the minstrel because it is the part of a young prince to greet a minstrel. You would have me walk well, speak well, keep silence well, all for the part's sake and because the world expects it of us. I would to God you had such a son as I would have made for you, if I had had the commission. He should have been a model ass, mother, a perfect courtier. Because I am indifferent to the customs of this three-acre kingdom, to which I am heir, you must follow me with your eyes, and wonder over my behaviour. I would I could persuade you to leave this hatching out of me; to forget, neglect, ignore, abandon me. See now, mother, I am a man: it is enough.

During this speech Gaston has entered.

Bernhard. Shall I begin now, your majesties? It will take some few minutes; and I will pass lightly over the part which deals with past history, and so come quickly to the bloom of the poem—

Otto. Hold your mouth, you loon! Cannot you see their majesties are troubled?

Wolfram. What is this mummary that you have planned to trap me with? Otto, what is that stack of

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

flowers in your hands? Bernhard, who taught you to write?

Elfrida. It is a birthday offering, cousin Wolfram. The queen has nothing to do with it. It is a posy and a poem from the villagers.

Gaston (to Wolfram). Come, come, Wolfram; these are men and women.

Wolfram. How did they know it was my birthday? And why should they make it ridiculous,—when it is merely sad? (*To Otto, taking the flowers.*) I will take the flowers for my grave. (*To Bernhard, taking the MS.*) And the poem—shall be buried with me.

Bernhard. But it must be read aloud to be comprehended, my lord—

Wolfram (relenting). It shall be read aloud. (*To villagers.*) Meet me, all of you, at the village inn, and I will drink a cup of wine with you. (*Gives back the flowers and the MS.*) I will read something aloud myself; and, Bernhard, it shall be five times as foolish as this. Go; and my thanks to you all. [*Exeunt villagers.*] (*To Queen.*) Now, madam, what would you?

Queen. I would nothing with you, my son; I did not mean to harass you. It was Gaston who told me of Pharamond. I spoke almost by rote; but I will say

ACT FIRST

nothing. Your heart is kind, I know, except towards me. I must to my chamber. Elfrida, will you come with me? And, Gaston, at a later hour attend me.

Gaston. I will, your majesty.

[Exeunt Queen and Elfrida.]

(Aside.) Such intercourse

Poisons the quickening blood within the lungs

And makes each breath we draw fresh agony.

(To Wolfram.) Wolfram, I cannot tell how my beliefs

May weigh with you; but on my life and soul,

Your treatment of your mother gives me grief.

What has she done that you should petrify,

With unexplained unkindness, every act

Done in her presence? And what lord are you

That you should walk across another's soul

As if your feet disdained the touch of it?

Oft have I wept a mother's early death,

Who lost me ere my lips could speak her name;

But since I see what suffering sons may cause,

I count her blessed that she died so soon.

Wolfram. What can an orphan know of mother's
love?

To tell the truth I hardly know myself

What thing it is that mutinies within

Against the tedium of this dummy-life

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Which mother's love and courtly etiquette
Mix for my portion. I am out of sorts
With doing rigorous nothing.

Gaston.

Nothing to do!

I would I had thy kingdom for a day,
I'd show thee what! See, Wolfram, I've my sword.
I'll hew my way to honour in this world.
And could it balk me, think you, that a mother
Loved me too much, or too distastefully?

Wolfram. This woman loves me not, but as a cat
Doth love her kitten, why?—for it is hers.
My soul she loves not, and not understands,
More than she loved or understood that man
Whom her ambition ruined. It was she
Who patched an ancient league to save her crown.
Because her princedom touched our boundaries,
They made a parchment marriage of the lands
And of the royal lines. Something of late
Breaks in my heart to see my father die.
Ruined he was ere we had sight of him;
Ruined, yet splendid in his majesty,
That cast the blame on no one but himself.
Gaston, hast thou observed my father well?

Gaston. Indeed, my lord, I think I have observed
him.

ACT FIRST

Wolfram. Ay, but not seen the fires of his soul,
That smoulder and break out beneath his brows
Across two decades of dishonoured life—
Death, call it rather.

Gaston. Nay, 't is no dishonour.

Wolfram. What we do think dishonour is dishonour.
He was a hero till she called him back,
And were he lying now at Antioch,
Would be a saint whose bones should cure disease.

Gaston. Many returned from that great enterprise
Who were not saints nor martyrs, and whose names
Have, since that time, had little currency.

Wolfram. But not like him, friend Gaston, not like
him!

Many there be in every enterprise
Who come because the current sweeps them in;
But those on whom a high vocation calls
Hear it in solitude, anteriorly.

Gaston. How means your lordship?

Wolfram. Know'st thou of his vow?
Did he not stand before the throne of God,
Alone and in the halo of his youth,
Transpenetrated by the rays of vision
That turned his very body into sight;

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

And, as the fire from the Creator's hand
Came down on his heart's altar, did he not
Return it in the wafture of his vow?

Gaston. No doubt he did, my lord.

Wolfram. Hast thou considered, Gaston, that a
vow,—

Being a column of transparent force
Set in the limbo betwixt God and man,
And drawing its gyration from the sky,—
When broken, lets a thousand tempests loose
That rave forever, seeking the lost point,
And wreck the soul with grieving?

Gaston. *Wolfram, truly,*
Thy words I understand not; but thy will
Touches my inmost heart to tragedy.

Wolfram. Ay, 't is the will I speak of. Turn we now
From the celestial vigour of his youth,
And view my father in the petulant gloom
Of a damp sick-room, nursed by vulgar quacks,
His mind and substance open to the sack
Of animals that prey upon disease;
Dying by inches, while assisting unfaith
Prolongs a traffic in expedients
That do not reach the spot. I stand alone.
My mother's prayers glance upward; but her hope

ACT FIRST

Is aimed too near the earth.

Gaston. What shall we do?

Wolfram. I know not what to do;

But some controlling impulse must be followed
Straight up to heaven. 'T is from the Absolute
All absolution comes. O Gaston, wilt thou help,—
If there be help to save us? Wilt thou swear,
Even as he swore, that if the time shall come,
And if volition have integrity
To fix again that column in the sky,
Thou 'lt lend assistance?

Gaston. Wolfram, I do swear.

What honour will permit I swear to do,
Though it were thy destruction.

Wolfram. Give thy hand!

The words I needed most!
This saving of ourselves doth ruin us.
'T is an impoverishment poured over us,
Even in our cradles, by maternal love,
Belittling all the prospect of our thought,
Which should be infinite.

Gaston. Nay, nay, come back,

Nor disappear within your cloud of words.
Action's the cure. And for the queen, beware!
The time may come when you upon your knees

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Shall ask your mother's pardon. Come, my lord;
A stranger waits his welcome of kind words
While you do rant about the infinite.

Wolfram. Gaston, thou'rt right.
Thy spirit cures me of an old disease,
And shows behind the stroke of thy rebuke
A sworded angel. Courage is the need;
And every virtue but a form of courage.
Seek we the singer.

Enter Ephraim, showing in Pharamond.

Ephraim. Here they are, Sir Pharamond.
Here is my young master—here is King Sigmund's son.

Pharamond. And as like him as flame is to fire.

Wolfram. Pharamond, welcome again to Minneberg. Art thou indeed that old playfellow of my father's youth? Time was he would talk of thee, and tell of the ballads you would ever be conning instead of learning to ride. I believe that in his heart there is a place that has been empty since you left,—though you were but a boy. Welcome, and thanks for coming.

Pharamond. I am paid already in seeing you, my lad. Your eyes are like him enough to be himself.

Wolfram. Nay, they are mine own eyes. But thou shalt see his, ere thou go. This is Gaston, my foster-

ACT FIRST

brother. If you love me, you must love him; for we are so intertwined that we cannot tell which is the tree and which the vine.

Gaston. Nay, I am the vine.

Wolfram. But wilt thou sing for us ere thou go?

Pharamond. Indeed I will. What else am I good for but to sing?

Enter Elfrida.

Wolfram. This is Elfrida, my mother's niece. She sings, herself, and plays on the lute.

Elfrida. I heard that thou wast come, Pharamond. And wilt thou teach me songs ere thou go? For it is eight years since a bard has come by here; and all my songs are old.

Pharamond. Willingly, my lady.

Wolfram. But wilt thou sing for us now, Pharamond? We are all in need of thee, and our need cries out and bids us make thee sing.

Pharamond. But of course I will sing.

Wolfram. Gaston, bid them tell the queen on my word to come hither. She will love this man. Bid old Hildebrand come at once. Tell him that Pharamond has come back and is going to sing us *Roland at Roncevalles*.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Elfrida. Not that, cousin, not that. Why should we all be set to weeping?

Wolfram. What else have we done in this castle but weep? Tell Hedwig, tell Karl, that a bit of the old castle has come back. Let them set a chair here for her majesty. (*To Elfrida.*) And, cousin, do thou sit on a low stool and listen, for this man is a master. (*To Pharamond.*) Nay, Pharamond, what I have most of all in my mind is my father's picture of thee reciting the *Song of Roland*. But we must have a throng to listen, or it is nothing. (*Goes about giving orders.*)

Elfrida (to Gaston). The prince is transformed. He has laid moping aside and is grown into a man over night.

Gaston. It is Pharamond's coming that has awakened all of us.

Elfrida. It is that, and more than that.

Pharamond (to Elfrida). The young prince has won my heart by resembling his father.

Elfrida. Nay, Wolfram is the greater man. He is greater even than Gaston here.

Pharamond (draws Gaston aside). It grieves me to hear on all hands that my old friend is not well. I have already seen things here that are strange. I like

ACT FIRST

not to ask the son so bluntly as I may ask you. Yet I beg you to find a few moments for private speech with me. I come from Mainz. And, to be short, I found there a full-blown conspiracy against the king and his heir. You have under this roof an arch-devil and traitor in the guise of a doctor. I have travelled day and night to reach you—I hope, not too late.

Gaston. Praise God you have come! When the singing is over, I will wait on you in private.

Elfrida (to Gaston). Pray Heaven that our merry-making do not wake the doctor; or we shall all be put in guard. But hush, here comes the queen.

Enter Queen; servants have been entering.

Wolfram. Mother, this is my father's friend the minstrel.

Queen. Pharamond, I bid you heartily welcome. You have already changed the air of this country-seat. You may judge for yourself that your name is not forgotten. At a word of permission, they flock. But do you sing for us now?

Pharamond. Such is the prince's desire.

A chair is set for the Queen. Gaston and Elfrida group themselves on smaller benches or stools. The old retainers stand about and listen.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Wolfram. Set old Hildebrand in the front: he is deaf. Now, Pharamond, what more dost thou need? A cup of wine for the minstrel!

Pharamond. Water, my lord; and bid my boy Gerard bring his viol and sit at my feet. The old custom demands it.

Enter Gerard; sits at Pharamond's feet and tunes his instrument. A cup of water is brought. While these arrangements are being made Elfrida and Gaston speak together.

Elfrida. I dread this valley, Gaston. In a moment we shall all be in tears. If I step out and avoid the ending, thou shalt say I am sick.

Gaston. Yes, my lady.

Elfrida. But I am not sick, Gaston.

Gaston. No, my lady.

Elfrida. Is it the need of pleasure, think you, this pang that runs about any circle of listeners at the first chords of a song? The fresh drops of music fall upon a great thirst in our souls. Everyone is athirst, Gaston.

Gaston. Attend the music, my lady.

Pharamond (sings).

High stand the crags; dark dream the dales;

Gray are the rocks in the dreaded ravine.

ACT FIRST

(He has no sooner begun, than a disturbance is heard outside the door which attracts everyone's attention.)

Martin (without). Ay, but I will come in! I have a message from my master to the queen that must be given instantly.

Wolfram. Silence! The next who whispers interruption

Shall learn good manners in the dungeon keep.

Enter Martin, pushing his way in. He is small, dressed in dingy black, with black skull-cap, greasy face and obsequious manners. He kneels and holds up a paper.

Wolfram. Who is this inky devil?

Hildebrand. He is a scullion in the devil's kitchen, my lord. It is the doctor's servant.

Wolfram. Here, take his paper, some of you; and you, Bruno and Hildebrand, do you take him And whip him soundly.

Queen. No! good Wolfram, no. He did what he was bid. Give me the paper.

(Reads it in silence, and hands it in silence to Wolfram.)

Wolfram (reads).

"There has come to this castle one who seeks my life. Let Pharamond be kept in guard till word from me.

Sigmund."

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

It is my father's hand; but not his mind.

Hildebrand. This is the fang of the wolf that will devour all of us.

Wolfram. This foreign swine will put our guests in guard!

Great God, I'll visit him, though he were hedged
With bars of burning brimstone! Wait ye here.
I charge thee, Pharamond, leave not thy seat
Till with my sword I wipe away the stain
Upon our house's hospitality.

Queen. Nay, nay, my Wolfram; woe upon that house
That stops a breach of manners with a murder.
Wolfram! You tarnish your immortal soul
To have, at last, the hacked and bloody corpse
Of this apothecary. Pharamond
Implores you wait the outcome of the day.
He is not hurt; his honour is not touched.

Pharamond. Indeed I do, my lord: I have no honour
That can be hurt by accidental slights.
The king's my friend. My coming to his house,
The welcome ye have given me, the joy,
Has reawakened every element
That makes men happy. 'Tis some grave mistake;
And we must meet it with benevolence.
What plot may lurk

ACT FIRST

Beneath this unexpected visitation
None of us knows.

Gaston. And till we do, my lord,
Let us not dip our fingers in hot blood.
To kill this quack would more inflame the king
Who fancies him his saviour.

Wolfram. I submit.

Hildebrand (at the door). Your majesty, the doctor
does approach.

Must I oppose his passage, or give way?

Queen. Oppose in no way, ancient servitor,
Aught that thy king commands. We will receive him.

Enter Hincmar, followed by Oswald and four men-at-arms.

Hincmar. The king, your majesty, his envoy makes
me

To acquaint you with his pleasure. I fulfil—
I do confess unwillingly fulfil—a needed office.

Queen. To his will we bow,
And do accept the embassy: speak on.

Hincmar. Madam, the king's amendment much de-
pends

Upon the freedom of his mind from cares
Which do besiege him. Policies of state

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

And long-protracted grieving over doubts,
Bound up with memories, have undermined—

Queen (interrupting). I see not that such diagnosis
falls

Within the scope and bearing of your preface,
Which touched, good master doctor, the king's pleasure,
Not his disease.

Hincmar. Ay, madam, 'tis his pleasure
To medicine his mind with needed rest.
It is his pleasure to be undisturbed,
And for the kingdom's governance to appoint
A minister, whose back shall take the brunt
Of daily businesses and petty cares
Repugnant to his nature and condition.
'Tis his good pleasure to devolve on me
Much that mine ease of heart might bid me shirk,
And my diviner studies contravene,
Were not his life at stake. He here has writ
The sum of my employments, which I give
By his command into your highness' hand;
By his command to ask you publish them
Condignly to all lesser ministers.

(He hands a document to the Queen; then says to Oswald:)

ACT FIRST

Oswald, the king himself instructed you.

Perform his will.

Pharamond. I beg you all to give no thought to
me,

Or my dilemma. I have scrambled through

Many rough places with his majesty;

And laugh already o'er the end of it. (*To Oswald.*)

Sir, I am ready.

[*Oswald arrests Pharamond, and exeunt, Hincmar walking out first, then Oswald with Pharamond, then the soldiers.*]

Wolfram. But that a greater issue stayed my hand,

I would have killed him, mother, as he spoke.

Amazing insolence! He wears his power

As if ambition were a grassy plume,

And his chain armour of dissimulation,

A wreath of smoke.

Gaston. He is no common man;

A fact our safety bids us reckon with.

What is his document? (*Takes it and begins to examine it.*)

Queen.

'T were rightly viewed

In more becoming leisure. Break we here

This gathering. My servants and my friends,

Go, all of you, about your usual work.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Orders to everyone shall be assigned.

The king must be obeyed. The prince my son

Gives us a kingly sample: copy him.

And keep as close a visage as ye can

Against all temper-trying scrutiny.

Go, all of ye, at once. *[Exeunt Servants.]*

Gaston, Elfrida,

Attend our further pleasure. Wolfram, my son,

I thank thee for thy undelivered stroke;

And thank God, too, who takes such strokes as that

Into his keeping for delivery.

(To Gaston.) What says the document?

Gaston.

This paper makes him

Administrator of the king's estate,

Legal, political, and military;

Ecclesiastical preceptor,—he to receive

Keys of all strongholds, tables of accounts,

Seals great and small, the legal judgment rolls,

The records of taxation—Why, my liege,

This is an abdication, not a writ!

Send to the emperor: this will not stand.

No feudatory can unking himself

To crown another. Send a messenger

To the Imperial Chancelry at Mainz,

And ask a speedy answer!

ACT FIRST

Queen. Send, ay, but how and whom? Yourself must
stay

To be our safety here.

Elfrida. Your majesty,—

If I may speak the thought that jumps in me,—

Send Pharamond. His gaolers are my friends;

And he himself has promised me a song,

Which well may be continued under guard.

Mark you, your majesty, the king's command

Assigns not solitude to Pharamond,

But only surveillance. And Oswald shall

Interpret it with such benign regard

(Under instruction from your highness' eyes)

That Pharamond shall sleep to-night at Mainz,

And on the morrow hail the emperor

To our deliverance.

Queen. What say you, Gaston?

Gaston.

'T is a likely plan,

And meets our need of haste. The doctor's shaft

Was fumbled in the aim, and grazes us.

To-morrow may clap feathers to his bolts.

Will not these servants, think you, be dismissed

Ere eventide?

Queen. What others can he get?

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Gaston. Others are marching towards us, out of doubt.

Queen. It is most like. The papers shall be drawn,
And by Elfrida brought to Pharamond.
Be seen about the castle, all of ye,
Calming the ruffled household with your looks,
And later bring your wits to my assistance.

ACT II

SCENE FIRST

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER

The Queen and Hedwig are at work over some domestic occupation.

HEDWIG. And which of your two sons did you love best last night?

Queen. Hedwig, you are an old witch. How did you know I was thinking of that?

Hedwig. Old witch! Why, that is what witches are. They are old servants; just cast-off servants. That is why they know everything.

Queen. You have always some sharp splinters of wit about you, Hedwig. And which of my boys do you think I love best,—in all your wisdom?

Hedwig. An easy question. 'Tis him you give the most pain to, Lady Margaret,—and your own son, of course; not the foundling.

Queen. Well, Hedwig, I believe I love Gaston the foundling—as nearly as any woman can—as much as my own son Wolfram. But it is many years since you have called me “Lady Margaret.”

Hedwig. And have not the thoughts of many years

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

ago been coming up in all our faces lately? May I give your highness a splinter of my wit to open your eyes with?

Queen. Why, I cannot prevent you, Hedwig.

Hedwig. Keep your hands off the lads and the lasses, Lady Margaret.

Queen. What say you?

Hedwig. Let them choose for themselves.

Queen. What do you mean, old Hedwig?

Hedwig. How little we know! How little we see! Dō as you would be done by, Lady Margaret. Your niece and Signor Gaston will make a match, if you will keep your hands off.

Queen. Gaston and Elfrida—

Hedwig. What has your own life been made by the meddling of elders?—grief and heart-burning. If they had let you alone, you would have married Count Hugo.

Queen. Hedwig, how dare you!

Hedwig. Well, it is long since; and yet it is near by. I think it is only yesterday that he bade you good-bye, and rode off on his charger; and he came back never again.

Queen. What is it, Hedwig?—that I should suffer

ACT SECOND

your ill-humour and your impertinence! You know I never loved Count Hugo.

Hedwig. More's the pity! He was a noble gentleman; and you gave him the heart-break. And you gave it to me.

Queen. This is intolerable! What has happened, Hedwig? If you take these liberties I shall have to send you away; and I *shall* send you away—forever.

Hedwig. All things have happened. Your marriage has happened. More's the pity, more's the pity. And this great match, and this great king, and his great kingdom, with everything to give you—everything except love—and that he never gave you; for he had it not to give, for he left his love at Jerusalem, and he sent you his child to bring up! Curses on him, it is the truth!

Queen. Hedwig, thou liest! Thou unclean animal! Leave me! Come not near me! Dost thou carry this filth in thy mind? Go, I say! And come not back. When I ring let Hilda come. Go, go! [*Exit Hedwig.* It is not true. 'T is not in Sigmund's nature. Such meanness is not in him. He has been Loving, repentant, shifting, pitiable; But never base. This hag would turn an act

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Of grace and goodness into infamy.
And yet the dates would make it possible.
Why did I never dream there was a child?
'T is very likely, though it heaps the sin—
But no, it is not true. He knew it not.
He could not, even in grief, have lived with me
And I not know it. I have drained his soul
Of all its meanings; and no child was there.
And were it so, could this defile the child?
My boy, my blessed Gaston, sent to me
As from the angels?—I must wash my heart,
Purge it with hyssop, ere I speak to him.

(Goes to a cabinet and takes out a package.)

Shall I speak now?—it has been long delayed,
And will draw off the poison from my soul.

(Rings a bell; enter Hilda.)

Tell Signor Gaston I would speak with him.

[Exit Hilda.]

It is a dread that haunts me, that some change
Will follow on my giving him the cross.

Enter Gaston. The Queen looks at him long and earnestly.

Whosoever child thou art, thou art my son
And Wolfram's brother.

ACT SECOND

Gaston. What, has he fall'n into his glooms again?
I left him in the zenith. Last night's work
Has roused him to ambition. Once for all,
I tell thee give him rein. He goes apace;
And at this moment is consulting me.
If't be for this that thou hast summoned me,
I must go back.

Queen. Nay, it is not for this: 't is for thyself.
A solemn hour I owe thee, long delayed,
Which the o'ergathered skies precipitate.
We cannot tell what storms begin to break,
Or how our lives may drift: it must be now.

Gaston. All hours of mine are thine, thou knowest
well.

Queen. When thou wast left within the castle gate,
Out of thy basket smiled a confidence
That shined on our first meeting, and still shines
On both our lives.

Gaston. From both our hearts, my lady.

Queen. Yes, from them both. But, Gaston, thy true
mother

Left—rather sent, for from her grave it came—
A package with a note.
It is her crucifix; and in the lines,
She begs they be withholden from her son

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Till he be grown to manhood. That is all.
I know not who she was, and ever kept
My thoughts from asking, since she told it not.
Read them not now; but when thou art alone.
Take it: 't is thine. (*Gives the package.*)

Gaston. My lady, I do take it,
As I have taken all things at thy hands,
Richer for passing through them.

[*She kisses him on the forehead and exit.*]

Dear gift, I have no time to think on thee.

(*Opens the package.*)

A crucifix!—that typifies perhaps
A crucifixion. Must I read the lines
Written in pain? The pain speaks out of them,—
Love, pain, and death.

SCENE SECOND

ON THE RAMPARTS

Distant View, Sunset. In some part of the architecture a small grated door leading into a Turret. Hildebrand on guard. Elfrida at first speaks to herself, later to Hildebrand.

ELFRIDA. That men should raise these great walls
towards heaven for the benefit of watchmen! All be-

ACT SECOND

low, dungeons and guard-rooms,—darkness and the crimes of the earth. And here above, they place a soaring heavenly nest, which swings beneath the stars at night; and, in the morning, turns to a sun-smit balcony above the ribboned river, overlooking the illimitable sea of the green earth. And in this niche of paradise they place a watchman, and bid him strain his eyes for dust. Dust must he see, dust watch for, dust dream of, while this changing magic of sky and land unrolls itself unseen before him. Hildebrand, what hast thou seen to-day?

Hildebrand. I have seen a company of Flemish merchants with their mules.

Elfrida. How dost thou know they were mules?

Hildebrand. Horses would raise a greater cloud, my lady. It is ever at this time of year that the Walloon traders pass by here, coming from the Rhine.

Elfrida. It would be hard to cast dust in thine eyes, old watchman; they are dust-proof. In how short a time will a good horse carry a good rider from this castle to Coblentz, Hildebrand?

Hildebrand. In four hours, my lady—three and a half if the roads be fair.

Elfrida. And from there to Mainz?

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Hildebrand. A matter of two hours.

Elfrida. Fetch me my lute, Hildebrand.

Hildebrand. I dare not leave the watch, my lady.
I must report each hour to Oswald.

Elfrida. Each hour, sayst thou? Is Oswald looking for troops, think you?

Hildebrand. I think nothing, my lady, but to do what the queen says, and to report to Oswald.

Elfrida. And if there come two hundred Swiss cut-throats headed by Satan himself, and this Iscariot bids you let them in, you will do so, I suppose.

Hildebrand. I shall report them to Oswald.

Elfrida. And Oswald will let them in?

Hildebrand. If Oswald turned key on Pharamond the minstrel, as good a friend as ever I had in my life,—and as good a friend as the king had,—I suppose he will.

Elfrida. Hildebrand, harkee! Pharamond is by this time in Mainz, raising troops to save us. Oswald is turning the keys in his lock, that the sound of the clicking may cause the devil to sleep.

Hildebrand. But does the queen know this?

Elfrida. Dost thou know this ring?

Hildebrand. Ay, the queen's ring.

ACT SECOND

Elfrida. I have been the round of all the guards with the story. Keep up thy vigilance, make thy reports, obey thy master the king and his master the doctor. If our friends arrive first, it is well; if not, we will throw down the mask and stand siege till they come. Go to: study thy dust; keep thy countenance; and talk little. I will sing a song to ease my heart, which thumps loudly. The lute is at the door; give it me.

(Sings and accompanies herself. Hildebrand returns to his guard at some distance, and during the song Gaston enters.)

SONG

Glad to his horse he springs,
The child of fifty kings,
Bids bolts be drawn.
Out of the castle's keep
He passes at a leap
Across the lawn.

Rides as his horse had wings,
And, as he gallops, sings
With sword half drawn.
To set the shackles free,
To save his friend, rides he
Across the dawn.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

(As she finishes the song she looks up and sees Gaston.)

Gaston, I cannot play this comedy longer. My steps falter, my heart aches, my head swims. How many days have we been in this trap?

Gaston. Since six o'clock yestreen.

Elfrida. Gaston, I had thought it a month. And how long must it continue?

Gaston. Why, as events go in this world, and with good luck on our side, I should say a week would bring the crisis.

Elfrida. And what will happen in this week?

Gaston. I take it that Pharamond will somehow get leave to lay our case before the emperor; and this will cause the enemy to show their hand,—we cannot guess how, but the fighting will be brought into the open.

Elfrida. And then?

Gaston. Then—I know not. But in the end the clouds will blow over our heads and leave the sunshine.

Elfrida. Gaston, Gaston, you are one of those men who take all things for granted,—fame, fortune, honour. Thou dost not reach out thine hand for these things; thou acceptest them, smiling. And thou wouldst endow all other men with the like gift of success.

ACT SECOND

Gaston. Success, lady? Do you speak of success to one who has no part or place in all this coloured life of the world, except to look at it? As I first opened my eyes on it, I learned that I was nothing. Amidst it all, I have schooled myself to be a cipher, lest I should betray the hospitality that took me in. I dare not speak now of myself, lest I shall break out and claim the place of others.

Elfrida. Thou, a cipher! Thou art the hoop that holds them all together, Gaston. They lean on thee as these walls lean on the cliff. Thou art everything; thou hast everything. It is all given thee because thou desirest nothing.

Gaston. Speak not so, Elfrida. Thou knowest not the cost. There are things I have wanted —

Elfrida. What, Gaston?

Gaston. There is a thing I have wanted much —

Elfrida. What, Gaston?

Gaston. I cannot have it; I do not ask it. But, Elfrida, the term of my apprenticeship is up. As soon as this trouble is over, I go to seek my fortune in the world.

Elfrida. Gaston! Thou wilt leave us!

Gaston. See, Elfrida, this thought is not new, but

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

an old and growing thought,—that I must speak; that I must go. And it is to thee that I must speak.

Elfrida. And why should you not?

Gaston. The queen this morning gave me news of my mother. It tells me nothing I knew not before ; and yet it is a signal, a bell that strikes, and tells me to speak at once and go. I would have spoken to thee before, but feared to surprise thee, feared to pain thee. And so I waited, thinking that time would show the better way of it.

Elfrida. Which time has done, Gaston.

Gaston. Elfrida, I love thee.

Elfrida. And why should you not? Must the women do all the loving in this world? Dost thou not think, Gaston, that for many years I have known thou lovest me? Dost thou not think that I have seen the struggle in thee and suffered in it? These things happen in duplicate, and transfer themselves to women from their lovers, like reflections in a glass. Why, Gaston, I love thee, and have always loved thee. I care not whether thou be a peasant or a prince. Why dost thou make so much protestation over a plain case?

Gaston. I thought thou wast predestined for thy cousin Wolfram.

ACT SECOND

Elfrida. For Wolfram? Why, if any woman were a proposition in metaphysical thought, Wolfram might look at her; but at me, never. I am not difficult enough; I am plain addition and subtraction. Besides, *I* would not have *him*: he is too remarkable. O Gaston, was it because the gypsy four years ago prophesied I should be queen, that you grew jealous? Fie, I am ashamed of you!

Gaston. It is not any of these things: it is the queen.

Elfrida. I love the queen as much as you can love her; and I owe her almost as much. But not so much as that, Gaston. If the queen have it in her heart that I shall marry her son, she must put it out of her heart. I cannot grant it.

Gaston. The queen has been to me mother, and father, and home; she has given me all. And if she have it in her heart that thou shalt marry her son, I will not interpose myself. It would be treason and ingratitude. Elfrida, I love thee, but I will not woo thee.

Elfrida. No! But thou wouldst play me as a pawn in the game of thy life! The knight, to save his honour, lets the queen take the pawn. Fie upon you, Gaston! I will not marry Wolfram. I will not marry him. I—will—not—marry him! And Wolfram himself shall beg you on his bended knees to marry me. The queen

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

shall beseech it. Must you be pressed further? The king shall ask it. See, Gaston my friend, the fighting is going to be brought into the open. This pawn occupies a strong position and shows fight.

Gaston. You are mad, Elfrida.

Elfrida. I am not mad, I am only sensible; and I will bring down your card house of romantic endeavour with a few strong strokes of common sense. Till you spoke I was powerless; but now I am the master. I praise God for it.

Gaston. Take care what you do, Elfrida!

Elfrida. Ay, I will take care.

Gaston. And do not add one more to the griefs that hang over this house!

Elfrida. Trust me, trust me, Gaston. The hard part is done. Do you think I have needed no tact or discretion during these last two years? Trust me, the rest is easy. Now tell me: Last night the king was up till midnight; and the doctor in the corner tower burned his taper till three. What can these two old men concert together at such times, think you?

Gaston. Affliction loves late hours.

Elfrida. And treason never goes to bed at all.
I must attend the queen. [*Exit Elfrida.*

ACT SECOND

Enter Wolfram followed almost immediately by Gerard.

Wolfram (to Gaston). Why, I have sought for thee
the castle o'er.

Gaston. Hast thou got news?

Wolfram. No news, but information;
Surmise, that may be valueless or not.
In our uneasy twilight of suspense
Shadows are things, and every rustling motion
A cause of fear.

Gaston. Well, let me hear the tale.

Wolfram. Some strangers have been near the castle
wall,
And seen by Gerard. But this is not all—

Gaston. And where is Gerard?

Wolfram. Gerard follows me.
(*To Gerard.*) Gerard, rehearse what thou hast told to
me.

Speak not too loud.

Gerard. At eventide, my lord,
Above the deepening shadows of the moat,
Figures that moved; I took them to be gypsies.
Lights in the bushes, shades,—I know not what.

Gaston. At eventide, you say. And where were you?

Gerard. On Clovis' tower, as the watchmen call it.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Gaston. The place you name is a neglected orchard?
One sees it plainly from the rampart's edge?

Gerard. Ay, that is it, my lord, beneath the cliff,
Outside the rampart. 'Tis an old men's home
For some few dying fruit trees.

Wolfram. This countryside is full of partridges
And gypsies, and their nests are ever thick
Beneath the bristling hedge of feudal war.
Yet it disquiets me to find a nest
So near the secret entrance to the castle.
Our enemy within has friends without.
May he not correspond with them by night,
Using this entrance? May not Gerard's gypsies
Prove to be Hincmar's spies? The covered way
Comes up within a bowshot from the spot.
Here soldiers might collect for a surprise.
Now for the news that brought me here in haste:
The guards are changed to-night; this western ramp
Has not a man assigned it in the order.

Gaston. Who told you this? It is significant.

Wolfram. Gerard, who had it from old Hilde-
brand.

Gerard. 'Tis so, my lord.

Gaston. Indeed. What shall we do?

ACT SECOND

Wolfram. Why, Gaston, you and I must take the watch.

There is no time for other stratagem.

At least we shall discover what is wrong.

Gaston. Agreed. And let us part immediately,

Lest we be seen together on this spot.

Is it at nine o'clock the guards go off?

Wolfram. Nay, ten.

Gaston. At ten, then, meet me here,
Or something after.

Wolfram. Gerard, come with me.

[Exeunt; Wolfram and Gerard on one side, Gaston on the other. The curtain falls; and immediately rises on the same scene by moonlight.]

SCENE THIRD

THE SAME. MOONLIGHT

Wolfram and Gaston in armour.

GASTON. We had best keep in the shadow of the tower till we know more. There below is the orchard Gerard spoke of.

Wolfram. And it is as silent as an apparition. I can more easily believe that Gerard imagined inhabitants for such a place than that he saw them. How many

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

a time have you and I, Gaston, counted dead rabbits in that spot when we were boys.

Gaston. It is, no doubt, for the same purpose that the gypsies have chosen it. Wilt thou preserve the game strictly when thou art king?

Wolfram. How strong a mystery abides in things at night! Those few old broken-hearted trees, those arches and masonry, which by day are heaps of rubbish, become, by night, wonderful. They move the heart; they overcome us with pity. What is there in the mere diminution of daylight that can do this? It dissolves the body and makes ghosts of us. Dost thou fear live men, Gaston, when thou viewest this place?

Gaston. It is the fear of live men-at-arms that has brought me here, and I rejoice greatly to find only ghosts.

Wolfram. And I fear only the spirit. What say you? Is it not because of the overshadowing of a spirit that we keep this vigil to-night? What gives the power to those men whom you fear, but the mysterious extinction of soul, the mystical eclipse in my father? Is not this, then, the reality; and are not your live men-at-arms, and your daylight, the illusion?

Gaston. I cannot follow you in the moonlight, Wolfram, but I believe you.

ACT SECOND

Wolfram. Know'st thou what is in my heart through all this siege, through all the plots and stratagems? It is in my mind that the arena of my father's sick-room is extended; and that you and I are become quack doctors,—with our engines of war, our pills, our bullets,—for the recovery of what?—of the castle, of our own lives. But for the recovery of my father's soul, which of us cares? While we lay our siege and hold our parleys, the powers of the infernal world lay siege to him. And would not I give all these astute triflings for one glimpse into that greater conspiracy? Would I not give—

Gaston. Hist! Stand close. Someone is coming. We were best retire further into the shadows.

(They retire a little; the clank of armour is heard.)

Wolfram. By their walk, armed men.

Gaston. Two of them. Who goes there?

Diedrick (without). Friends to the Archbishop.

Wolfram (to Gaston). What should that mean?

Gaston. It is some countersign.

Enter Diedrick and Hans in armour with visors down.

Wolfram. Thy voice is not strange as are thy words. Stand, in the king's name! Villains, if ye budge I'll hew ye to the earth. Gaston, fall on!

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

(They fight. Diedrick and Hans are killed.)

Wolfram. Now to the entrance grille and throw the
bar

Before the rest are on us. These have had
A key at their disposal.

[Exit Gaston and the sound of falling bars is heard. Wolfram kneels by the body of Diedrick.]

Oh for a light!—for if there be not more,
These must have papers. They were messengers.
Would God we had a light!

(Pulls some papers from Diedrick's breast.) I thought
so.

Gaston (reëntering). Silent as death below: there
are no more.

Wolfram. We have here that which shall unravel
our mystery.

Would God we had a light!

Gaston. Someone is coming up the turret stairs.

Wolfram. It is the master of these wretched men,
Who keeps a rendezvous—Hincmar, no doubt.
He shall not pass the threshold. Stand you there;
And, lest he stumble over our dead friends,—
(Pushes the bodies each to one side.)

ACT SECOND

Even as he issues kill him!

The door in the turret opens rustily and enter the King.

Great powers of God!

It is my father, tottering, infirm,
His eyes uncertain, and his hands outstretched,
As if he begged for mercy. He's alone;
And has, perhaps, escaped his gaoler's eye
To catch the unclouded beauty of the night,
Stealing salvation. Go, good Gaston, go,
And get between this doctor and his prey.
Leave me alone with this imperilled soul
That beats its wings against the cage of life
And finds no door. Go, Gaston; keep a watch,
And warn me; for the fiend is close behind.

(Gaston retires a little.)

King (to himself). Deep calls to deep; there is no
secrecy.

All hidden crimes are written on the sky;
A change of light will show them. Yet we fight
To keep them under key. Her voice all night
Has floated over me in cadences
More soft than an aeolian instrument.

Wolfram (to himself). This is no sickness; this is
sanity,—

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

The healing pain that madness cannot bear.
O God, that didst unravel this sick soul,
And, skein by skein, didst cast it on a heap,
Thy power begins to build it back to life.

Gaston (returning to Wolfram). My lord, 't were best
we do absent ourselves,
Nor stand too near the portals of a spirit
Open to the utmost. Many a good man's life
Has passages a son may leave unguessed.

Wolfram (to himself). See, in the darkness where
we thought him lost,
This light was dawning. (*To Gaston.*)

Didst thou speak to me?

Gaston. I say it is unseemly to observe him.

Wolfram. Go to thy post! I knew not thou wast here.

[*Exit Gaston through the grated door.*]

King (to himself). Is she within me, that I feel so
clear

The proclamation of her silent will?

Wolfram. It is my will, my father, thou dost feel.
What thou hast done I know not; who she was
I care not; what it is that bids thee speak
None of us knows. Yet speak it to the world,
That has no power to punish, save by fear

ACT SECOND

Of punishment. Proclaim it openly,
And these hallucinations will be laid
Asleep in the sunlight.

King. Wolfram! art thou here?
What hast thou heard?

Wolfram. Enough to make me glad,
Though understanding little.

King. Wolfram, Wolfram,
I dare not think of thee.

Wolfram. Thou hast no need
To think of me. Keep all thy thoughts above me.

King. Yet falls thy lion's shadow on my path!
Wolfram, thou wilt take vengeance—

Wolfram Nay, 't is past.
Thy sacrilege was over all of us,
And thy redemption. Father, I have known
Thy vow of youth,—some sin, some tragedy,
Of which thine outward sickness was the sign.
Can you not think I wore it in my life
From boyhood up? But youth and reticence,
Before the shadow of a father's sin,
Are dumb. Now manhood, grief, and pain
Make me the father. 'T is a mystery,
Yet plain to homely thought. Confess the sin.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

I meant not to disturb your reveries;
It is by accident God grants me here
A moment's flash of speech. Your friend will come,
And draw you back through subterranean paths
To policy and medicine.

King. Wolfram! Wolfram!

Wolfram. Promise to speak.

King. Dost thou, too, urge me, Wolfram?

Wolfram. Promise to speak.

King. My son, I promise thee.

Wolfram (to Heaven). Do Thou accomplish it! He
needs me not.

Gaston (without). My lord, the doctor comes!

Wolfram. Ay, let him come.

The air will do him good.

Enter from the grated door first Gaston, then Hincmar with a lantern.

(*To Hincmar.*) Good evening, sir.

Hincmar (to the King). Is't by your orders that
these gentlemen

Find themselves here to-night? If it be so,
I cannot for your life be answerable.

King. Nay, it is no one's fault—an accident.
Good Hincmar, be assured. I grow so strong

ACT SECOND

Through your good care of me, 't will do no harm.

Hincmar. Harm beyond cure to what you hold
most dear

May come of it. Take care, your majesty;

It is no trifling business brings them here.

'T is much the best you go to bed at once,

And let me reason with them.

Wolfram.

Ay, good father,

Leave him to reason with us: so 't is best.

King. I will obey you both.

Hincmar (sets down lantern and ushers out the King).

I would not for my life

Have had your holy purposes disturbed

By such infringement of your solitude,

Done at the greatest hazard to your health,

By those to whom I thought your health was dear.

*[Exit King through the grated door, followed
by Hincmar.]*

Wolfram. Obsequious serpent! Gaston, guard the
door!

A light, at last! *(Takes the lantern, kneels by the body
of Diedrick and holds the light to the page.)*

It is a letter with no signature,

The bearer dashed with mud from head to heel.

Perhaps the secret of my father's life

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Lives in these pages. To my soul alone
Belongs the interview. (*Puts the letter in his pocket.*
Opens the visor of the dead man.) Diedrick, is it thou?
Thou hast for a few ducats sold thy king,
And almost killed myself, that was thy friend.

Enter Hincmar, with somewhat of a flourish.

Hincmar. What have ye done to get this interview?
(*He catches sight of the dead bodies, and instantly*
springs back within the turret, shutting the grated
door as he does so.)

Gaston. Walked on the castle wall to count the
guards.

Hincmar. Some of whom ye have killed, ye sorry
boys!

Gaston. Villain, 'tis thou that slew'st them. They
have here

Pretasted of the cup that thou shalt drain.
Have at thee! Thou hast here immured the king,
Swept the coast clear of all protecting guards,
And dost, we know, by daily correspondence
Invite the enemy to a surprise.
'Tis best you know what follows your success.
If that we find success is like to follow,
On the first stroke or sign of likelihood,

ACT SECOND

I dedicate my life to killing thee.

Hincmar. I had not thought to laugh within this castle!

Ye do expect an ambush, laying one.

I'll tell the king his cause is in good hands.

Why, these are household servants ye have killed,
Doing a household errand for the court.

Gaston. Ay, if you wish their letter come and get it.
Go in, thou hoary traitor, thou false friend,
To fawn and lick the hand that thou wilt bite.

Wolfram. Go in, old man: we have enough of thee.
Thy power is waning and thy downfall near.

Hincmar. Good night, young masters. When my
downfall comes

"Twill not be through a foundling and a bastard!

[*Exit Hincmar.*]

Wolfram. Twice has he made miraculous escape
Out of our hands. But this time he hath left
A thing behind more precious than his life.
Gaston, it is enough for one night's work:
Our vigil was not wasted. Let us here
Gather these corpses up, and make them fit
For burial on the morrow. Then to rest,
And meet what else that morrow may bring forth;
For life begins to stir.

ACT III

SCENE FIRST

A ROOM IN THE CASTLE

Wolfram. His looks show that he has been up all night.

WOLFRAM. At last I am alone. It is the first hour in the last four and twenty in which I find one moment of solitude. I have buried the two knaves. The scudding of events beats my brain dizzy. Let me see. I have seen the king my father. And what said he to me, or I to him? I bade him repent, or the spirit in both of us cried out "repent,"—I know not which. For, as the gulf opened and showed him to me as he is, my soul was leaping to a new horse that tore the air above. Some climax roars like a torrent and sweeps ever nearer—threatening not my father nor me alone; but all, all of us. The ship of state rides on a flying wave before the blast. What was it that I must read or think on alone? (*Searches his breast and pulls out the letter taken from Diedrick's body.*) What now, if this should contain something touching myself? I'll not read the dirty packet. Yet in the fumes of the volcano last night I read my name. "Wolfram, thou wilt take vengeance." No; I promise thee.—Come, this is trifling with

ACT THIRD

men's lives. (*Reads.*) "You will by this have secured proofs of the king's earlier marriage which will confirm our most sure discoveries and place the bastardy of Wolfram beyond a doubt." This, then, is the plot,—to disinherit me. The shallow rascals! Nay—an early marriage! The king's remorse, then, should be not for the ruin of a maid, but for the desertion of a wife.—His dread of me,—fear lest I should revenge,—his recent sickness, which followed their discovery or threats,—all tend to prove them right. Let me keep cool. (*Reads.*) "We have four witnesses who know the fact, but none who can prove it. You must work upon the king. His wife did not die till—"

It is the truth! The devils have the truth!

And I have pulled the handle of perdition

By conjuring my father to confess.

Wolfram, thou hast thy dream,—thou art a soul

Dissevered from the common bonds of life.

How dost thou like it? Thou hast now no place

Beside the friendly firesides of earth,

No duties common to humanity

Of fixed inheritance. Thou art a name,

A byword, the memento of a crime,

A spirit in thyself; but nothing more.

Come, I am wasting pity on myself,

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Whiles others need it.

O thou old king, what evil hast thou done
On two defenceless women! One is dead;
One lives to catch all pity for the first,
And keep it fresh—my mother. Why on her
Should fall such desecration? Why on one
Most innocent, most loyal, and most proud,
On whom dishonour's touch was powerless
Even in the thought? O father, it was base!
Weakness in man doth gash a woman's life
Deeper than crime.—And I that thought her cold!
Living within the chill of infamy
That oozes from this damned castle's walls,
Divided from her son. I'll go to her,
Lest a portcullis fall again between
And cut us off—

Enter Queen.

O mother, do you come
As I did fly to you? Wilt thou forgive me?

Queen. For what, my son?

Wolfram. For all the insolence,
Cruelty, slights, neglect, misunderstanding,
Suspicion, and aloofness from thy heart
With which my ingrate nature punished thee.

Queen. Indeed, indeed, my Wolfram, I forgive thee.

ACT THIRD

Wolfram. Thou hast had griefs that were not in my
ken;

And these, instead of softening, distanced me,
And made me misinterpret. They, perhaps,
Did underlie my moods, and made me mad
To feel the grope of them. Oh, thou hast needed me
When I have cast thee off and thought thee cold.
It was the hope thy son should prove a man,
Which I have thought ambition, claiming me.

Queen. 'Tis true that I have felt myself alone,
And have had sorrows that thou knewest not.
Women do best who in their quandaries
Make husbands of their sons. But I could not,—
Nor would not break the globe of thy beliefs,
Which were thy birthright, and perhaps his too.
'Tis true that I have seen in thee a hero
Who should amend all ancient misery;
There was ambition in it, and some claim.

Wolfram. Of course, of course; what woman could
do else?

They are intrinsic in a mother's heart,
And I a feeble creature to resent them.
Wilt thou believe that I can cherish thee
Through what may come? We know not what may
come,

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Yet something, with these tremblings of the times,
Is bound to come. The earth beneath our feet
Seems to be moving; some convulsive shock
Will shatter those who trust it.

Queen. O my son,
Stand we upon the truth, and glancing up
Await the transformation. I care not
So thou do stand beside me.

Enter Ephraim.

Ephraim. Your majesties, Sir Pharamond
Is come from Mainz, and craves an audience.

Queen. Pharamond here?
Let him come up; and bid Count Gaston come.

Ephraim. Pardon, your highness, Pharamond doth
ask

A private word before your majesties.

Wolfram. Let him come up. [*Exit Ephraim.*]
Despite all earthly power,
State secrets turn to gossip in an hour.

Enter Pharamond.

Welcome, good Pharamond; thy embassy
Most promptly is performed. What news from Mainz?

Pharamond. Both good and bad, my liege.

Wolfram. Tell the best first,

ACT THIRD

That we be fortified to greet the worst.

Pharamond. First, first and best, — your safety is secure.

The emperor does send a martial troop,
And places his protection o'er the castle.
All danger of surprise or siege is past.
And here, perhaps, should my recital end,
For safety was the purpose of my flight.

Wolfram. Tell in oneword what else thou hast to say.

Pharamond. My liege, no word will tell it. I did find
At Mainz a nest of intrigue, 't is too true;
A party strongly knit and well informed,
Who stand behind the doctor's insolence,
And prophesy some ruin to your throne.

Queen. We all have guessed this Hincmar was a spy.
But is the emperor committed to them?

Pharamond. I do not think so, lady. Our appeal
Came hot before their project was unmasked:
We had his ear the first. The enemy,
Seeing me prosper with the emperor,
Put in, post haste, their plea; with what result
We soon shall know. Imperial couriers
Follow me at the heels. I dared not stop
To learn their message, lest my doing so
Should lose you mine.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Enter Ephraim, followed by Courier.

Ephraim. Your majesties,—the imperial courier.
(*Courier kneels and delivers a paper to the Queen,
who hands it to Wolfram.*)

Wolfram (examining it). It is a writ
From the Imperial Chancelry at Mainz,
Appointing a commission to hold court,
Take proof, and issue judgment on all facts
Affecting my succession to this throne.
Mother, take heart; the liquid bolt of light
That rives the oak and kindles it to flame,
Finds passage through the unopposing will,
And leaves us stronger. Can we, then, much fear
The fulminations of a chancelry?

Pharamond. Who's the commissioner?

Wolfram (still examining the paper). Prince Ægidius.

Pharamond. The great elector? Why, thank God
for that!

One of the pillars of old chivalry,
That lifts the roof o'er honour,—such a man
As Charlemagne imagined in his dreams
Might catch his mantle as he left the earth.
Upon my troth, the emperor, though young,

ACT THIRD

Has dignified himself by such a choice.

Where sits the court, my liege?

Wolfram.

Here, and at once.

(To the Courier.)

His excellency follows, does he not?

Courier. Two hours behind, my lord; and with him
come

The hands and feet of justice,—sheriffs, criers,
And paper-filling scribes; with, at their head,
Two of the greatest clerks of Christendom
To plead on either side: Brevarius,
Who stands for the proceedings 'gainst your crown,
While to your cause Arnolfo is assigned.

Pharamond. Arnolfo, on whose wit the inspired pilot
Ever casts anchor in a hurricane!

Wolfram, we shall be saved.

Wolfram.

But not by him.

The law doth wreck, not save. Here, Pharamond,
Provide this gentleman with an accueil
Fitting his station; and, in all that follows,
Remember we are hosts.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

SCENE SECOND

THE BANQUET-HALL

In the centre of the stage, at the back, Ægidius sitting as judge. Before him a table covered with volumes, inkstands, documents, etc. At one end of the table (at Ægidius' right) sit Arnolfo and his associates; at the other end Brevarius and his associates. On Ægidius' right, and front, but on a lower chair, sits the King, and by him stands Hincmar. On the same side, but at some distance from the King and nearer the audience, sit the Queen and Wolfram, who is dressed with care. On Ægidius' left, and front, is a witness-stand which balances King and Hincmar. On the same side, but nearer the audience, are Gaston, Elfrida, and Pharamond. The whole disposition is somewhat informal and shows its improvised character. The only person in the whole play whose dress should be conspicuously handsome is Ægidius. Before speaking, he takes off a jewelled sword and lays it on the table before him.

ÆGIDIUS. King Sigismund, and his much honoured queen,

I greet and thank you both for our reception.

We may not choose our duties in this life,

Else had I shuffled this commission off,

And bade my master find a fitter judge

Than an old soldier, worn and out of use,

ACT THIRD

And ignorant of clerkly reasoning,
Tho' skilled in steely argument of war.
Such as I am, I do accept the task,
Feeling it weighty, and myself most weak.
Pray you believe, King Sigmund and his queen,—
And you, young sir, who stand in jeopardy,—
I know no further in this controversy
Than what the writ reveals.
(*To Clerk.*) Read the commission,—
The phrases which assign the scope of it,—
Not the whole document.

Clerk. My lord, you are
Appointed to take proof and issue judgment
On all the facts affecting the succession
Of Wolfram, heir presumptive to the crown.
Ægidius (to Clerk). Hold the Evangel. (*Clerk holds
the book, a folio. Ægidius rises.*) I, Ægidius,
Prince Palatine, Imperial Elector,
Knight of Apollo's Well, and Guardian
Of the Holy Sepulchre, Count of Antioch,
Swear to adjudge this cause in innocence,
Without reward, unmindful of result,
According to its merits and the light
Accorded me from Heaven: So help me God.

(*Sits down.*)

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Pharamond (to Gaston). Is't not a paladin! The
style of Cæsar,

Begemmed with bits of Christian metaphor,
And all imperial. What a spectacle!
Were we not moved too deeply to enjoy,
This were a pictured pageant, stiff with gold
That needed only music for a frame.

Gaston. Music that burns in the heart like tears
unshed!

See the poor queen. (*Goes and stands by the Queen.*)

Brevarius. May it please the court:—
This is an action issuing from the crown,
And set on foot by the imperial power,
Which seeks by inquisition to make sure
The just succession of King Sigismund.
The precedents, too numerous to quote,
Are briefed for reference. If a doubt be raised
As to the jurisdiction, we do rest
Upon the queen's appeal of yesterday,
Which at the emperor's feet throws all her rights.
Now it so happens that the queen's appeal
Meets us half-way in a prolonged research
Through records, documents, and witnesses,—
The dusty trail of a well-buried past,—
And crowns the establishment of certain facts

ACT THIRD

Which make a regency inevitable.

Your honour will permit me to be brief:—

(*He adjusts his spectacles, shifts papers, etc.*)

Queen (*aside*). Can the last judgment hold a pain
like this?

The callow, almost sacred sins of youth,
Which I, his wife, forgave, to be dug up,
Handled, and verified. *I* dreamed them out,
And laid them, as I thought, asleep forever.

Brevarius. We shall establish, may it please the
court,

That Sigmund, then crown prince of Minneberg,
In the year eleven hundred, being then
Upon a journey to the Holy Land,
Met in Bavaria at Wittelsbach
One Eva Adelaide Meisterthaler,—
Daughter to a burgomaster of the name.
That the said Eva in the prince's train
Travelled to Augsburg, where, on Sunday morn,
The fourteenth day of August, by a priest,
In the lesser chapel of the Carmelites,
The twain were married.

Queen (*springing forward*). Never married, prince!
It is the pitiful tale of reckless youth,
Too common and too sad for scrutiny,

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Which many a man has worn about his neck,
And many a woman wept o'er. Must it be
That I, a woman, bid men play their part
In weighing at their worth the sins of love,
Not mousing o'er the grief they leave behind?

Ægidius. 'Fore God, a valiant lady! 'T is the truth.
(*To Brevarius.*) Confine the pleadings to the evidence,
And let thy words be dry. I'll not sit here
To see law's dogs drag sorrow up and down,
To make a sport for servants.

Brevarius. 'T is my aim
To keep to the bones of the matter; dry they are.
(*Continuing.*) Thereafter, in the autumn of the year,
After—the episode of which I spoke—
Prince Sigmund's father died, and he returned
From Germany, was married and was crowned,
In quick succession; leaving Adelaide,
Who to a sheltering convent turned her steps,
And there gave birth, before her own decease,
To a child,—a boy, so please your excellency—
Of whom uncertain information lives.
His disappearance does not prove his death;
Nay rather, his survival is surmised
From sundry finger-posts of circumstance.
What we shall clearly find and plainly prove

ACT THIRD

Is that upon the seventeenth of May—
The date of his highness' marriage to the queen—
Both Adelaide and the aforesaid child
Were surely living. Witness, take the stand!

Clerk. Anna Maria Schmiede, take the stand.

(After some movement among the court officials, a very old, little, bent nun is led forward and set upon the witness-stand.)

Arnolfo (to Brevarius). Your pardon, learned colleague, you do prove

The marriage by this witness, I suppose.

Brevarius. No, not by her. That will come later on.

Arnolfo (rising very slowly to his full height, and addressing the Court). Your honour will not bid me take your time

With argument to show so plain a thing,—
That till my friend produce his proofs of marriage,
All this proceeding is a sorry farce,
Impertinent, expensive, and most trivial.
A proof of valid marriage, if produced,
May make this woman's word of some account;
But, till produced, I see not that it matters
What ancient tales she tells. Her majesty
Has sounded the keynote of this affair,
And made our labours light.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Brevarius.

Nay, brother doctor,

The order in which evidence appears

Is unimportant, so it all get in.

'Tis elementary that we may put

Our case with such foot forward as we please.

Arnolfo. Ay, brother jurisconsult, so you may,

In cases where your suit concerns a cow,

Bring the beast in tail foremost if you please,

Shove her in sideways. But in what concerns

The honour of a kingly family,

You may not bring in chronicles of vice

Upon your say-so that some after-proof

Will make them competent.

(*To the Court.*) The proofs of marriage,

My lord, the proofs of marriage, are his case.

Let him produce them.

(*Brevarius and his subordinates consult.*)

Pharamond (to Gaston). Did I not say Arnolfo's
master-grip

Would throw the rascals? He has frozen them.

They winter at the pole. Their lips are dry.

While good Ægidius glows with kindly fire.

He will sustain Arnolfo.

Ægidius.

Brevarius,

Till you give proof of this alleged marriage,

ACT THIRD

No witness can be heard: I so decide.

Pharamond (to Wolfram and the Queen). There is no proof! 'T is plain, there is no proof.

Look at Brevarius whose looks disprove
All proof! Is he not like an angry hound
That dares not bite?

Queen (aside). Why did I never dream there was a child?

Ægidius. I see no proof forthcoming; and herewith
I shall dismiss this most indecent suit,
Reporting to the emperor my pain,
Mingled with joy, that I was chosen judge.
Madam,—

(A movement among the officials. The King has risen and moved forward.)

Hincmar. My lord, the king would speak.

King (after one or two efforts in which his lips move without producing a sound). I do confess the marriage.

(A spontaneous murmur of disgust and reprobation runs about the court-room.)

Ægidius. Order!

He has not heard aright; or is not sane.
What dost thou say?

King. I do confess the marriage.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Ægidius. 'Fore God, thou art a most confounded villain!

Hadst thou the cruelty to hold thy tongue
When speaking would have saved one woman's life;
And now the cruelty to wag thy tongue
When speaking kills another? Look to the queen.

(The Queen is hanging between Wolfram and Gaston, almost in a faint. While continuing to support her, Wolfram addresses the Court.)

Wolfram. Let him go on, my lord; it is a vow.
This is the breaking of a life-long cloud,
That blinds us with its downpour of black filth,
To leave the stars behind. Let him go on!
Nor are we, in this clap, less ignorant
Than in the daily blindness of all life.
I charge me with the safety of the queen.
I am her son, and know her. Let him speak.

Ægidius. A son as mad, though in a different vein,
As his sick father. Youngster, dost thou know—
Dost thou not understand—that his confession
Makes thee a bastard?

Wolfram. Prince Ægidius,
Thy function here is to adjudicate,
Not to advise, though wisely. For my birth,
I care no more if it be base or noble

ACT THIRD

Than if my mantle rustle in the wind—
Save as it touch this lady; and for her
God has his shield.

Arnolfo (to the Court). I will interrogate
The doctor on the king's insanity,
Under the court's instruction. Doctor Hincmar,
Is the king's malady somewhat of the brain?

Hincmar. It is, my lord, 't were useless to deny,
A brain-sick weakness; but I cannot say
Reaches insanity. He has himself
Writ and subscribed a competent confession,
Which, as I understand, he will submit.

King (handing a document). This is my testimony.

Arnolfo.

We protest!

Your honour must not take the madman's screed.

Ægidius. I take it subject to his sanity;
Which, for the honour that I owe mankind,
I'll not believe in.

(Clerk takes and marks the document.)

Brevarius. May it please the court:
The ruling of your lordship as to proof—
Order of proof I mean—being satisfied,
We will proceed to call our witnesses.
Clerk, swear the witness.

(The Clerk does so in dumb-show.)

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Pharamond (aside). This is a dreadful day of baffling hopes,
That wear the spirit to a dead fatigue.
Can our case rise again from such a blow?
Yet Wolfram glares in triumph.

Ægidius. (To Witness.) Speak louder! *(To Clerk.)*

What's her name?

(Makes a memorandum.)

Clerk. Anna Maria Schmiede, servant at the convent.

Ægidius. Best repeat her words.

She is too old, and cannot more than whisper.

Clerk (listens and repeats in detached phrases). In May, 1101, was scrub-woman at the Convent of Saint Cyrilla, five miles from Augsburg. On May nineteenth Eva Adeïaide Meisterthaler came to convent for succour and protection; and five days later there gave birth to a child, a boy. The woman Adelaide had no possessions except a crucifix, before which she prayed constantly. The crucifix was marked with her initials E. A. M. She died on May thirtieth. On the following day both child and crucifix disappeared; as did also one of the sisters, Felicia Augusta. No pursuit was made.

(During the following soliloquy of the Queen, the taking of testimony proceeds in dumb-show in the

ACT THIRD

background and absorbs the attention of the other persons on the stage.)

Queen. 'Tis sure my husband knew not of its birth.

(She glances at the King, who has fallen on his knees.)

And with it disappeared the crucifix.

Her cross, her child,—and she his lawful wife!

O thou poor German girl that died'st alone,

Holding the key that might have made thee proud,

And using it to unlock the heart of God,

Across the years thy spirit beckons me.

Thy bark was wrecked, thy garden desolate,

Thy child disherited; and, in a night,

Injustice in my form supplanted thee.

Some women for their child will venture all,

To press his claim; but thou, more rich in faith,

Sendest thy treasure to thine enemy.

I'll not betray thee! Though my pain be sharp,

It is but younger sister unto thine.

Two children were there,—one to be a king,

And one a castaway. O cruel maid!

Thy speechlessness doth call the earthquake up,

And God hath heard thee. Lo, I lay my boy

Upon the altar.

(To Gaston.) Gaston, give me leave:—

Fetch me thy crucifix. That other maid,

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

That sent it me, minds me to look on it.

[*Exit Gaston.*]

I cannot guess what passes in his mind,
Which ever seems a mirror to the truth
First seen by others; yet he must be dull
If he not feels the surge.

Enter Gaston.

Dear Gaston, think—

But speak not yet. Besides thyself and me,
Two persons in this room do know this cross,—
Thy father and the aged sister there.
I must produce it. Gaston, tell the court
That I must speak.

Gaston. The queen, my lord, would speak.

Ægidius.

Let her be heard

Queen. Pardon, grave sirs, if with the utterance
Of one too nearly touched to tell her tale,
I give what all of ye must know at once.
It is the key and cipher of four lives,
Delivered to you by the hand of God.
In my first weeks of marriage with the king
My servants found before the castle gates
A cradled ark of osier newly twined,
Holding in its green arms a smiling boy

ACT THIRD

And a sad crucifix; with some few words,
Such as a dying mother might have scratched,
To supplicate the pity of the world.

I, in my hope for children of my own,
Took the newcomer as their messenger;
Accepted, cherished, loved him as my son,
Nor ever found he was not more than mine.
Most of ye know him.—Prince Ægidius,
This is the crucifix, and this—the child.

(She sinks into a chair; and soon after breaks into uncontrollable sobbing. Amidst the stir which follows her announcement she is not greatly noticed, till Wolfram addresses her. During her grief, Hedwig goes and kneels by her side.)

Wolfram. Thy thunderbolt at last! How comes it down,

In the clear passage of benignant light.

Was this the thing ye feared? Why, this is joy!—

The resolution of a thousand ills.

Gaston, thou art this kingdom's lawful king;

As thou hast been in all these years a prince,

And kingly spirit moving in our midst,

Half known. Some men are made to rule;

And these must never isolate their mind,

But merge it in the sentient soul of all.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

So art thou chosen out by Destiny
To save this state from me. Did I not say
The whirlwind could resume its upward force,
Restoring order in those starry depths,
From which our souls are fed continually
In the enwheelèd motion of the sky?

Gaston. Ay, thou didst say as much, I make no
doubt.

Wolfram. Lo, now the meek inherit, and a child
Upsets the shrewdest guess of politics.
The lost maid's legacy doth save us all,—
The cry of a frail saint whose thread of life
Was soon and rudely snapped; yet on her will,
As on its axis, turns our history.
Mother, thy Gaston waits to comfort thee.
We owe him much, but chiefly my release.
Thou couldst not, mother, make a king of me,
Nor keep him from his own. We all are planets,
Which live within each other's influence,
Controlled, protected, passing to eclipse,
Or reappearing in the effulgent sun
Through the same power, which by our apprehension
Becomes ourself. And if a man will trust it,
I give him leave to call it what he will,—
Love, thought, illusion, destiny, or God.

ACT THIRD

Gaston, the crown is thine.

Gaston. I would not take it, were it the crown o'
the world,
So springing from the ruin of this house! Think you,
my lord,
I will not follow in adversity
Those who befriend the outcast? I have had
The love, the education, all the share
A child might take beneath his father's roof.
And if ye fall, I count my share in the loss
As so much gain.

Wolfram. Gaston, didst thou not swear,
If ever God should give the countersign,
To rip the mask from off the face of life
And show the features? Thou didst vow thine aid
In this contingency. And, brother, think you
Thy share of this inheritance was small
Even from the beginning? Come, thou art the king.
Thou *art* the house, the royal family,
And all that thou hast taken was thine own.
(*To Ægidius.*) Is not this law, my lord, or can his
will
Affect his birthright?

Ægidius. If he be the heir,
He must inherit. His consent is null.

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Which of us hath consented to be born,
Or was not unconsenting thrust on life,
On law, on title, on identity?—
Which here is all the question.

Gaston. I am bound.
Wolfram, I fear I never so can shield thee
As thou hast shielded me—

Wolfram. 'Tis not my need;
But be content. Thou givest me my need,
And that thou knowest. (*To Elfrida, who has come forward.*) Would'st thou speak to me?

Elfrida. I have, my lord, a suit; 't is a petition,
Long carried in my heart, though something strange,
And one, perhaps, a maid is slow to press.
Yet are these happenings so extraordinary
That my strange conduct suits them: judge yourself.

Wolfram. Make all petitions to your lawful king,
Who stands to weigh them. I am servant here,
And can but introduce you.

Elfrida. Nay, my lord,
He has refused me.

Gaston (to Elfrida). What dost thou begin?
Is this the season for an ill-timed jest?

Wolfram. Nay, let her speak. I do accept the suit,

ACT THIRD

And promise my assistance with the king.

Elfrida. My lord, ye all have seen his constancy;
And know the abnegation in his soul,
Which even now has glanced a crystal shaft
Across us all. I will not call it cold,
But of a superhuman purity,
Most hard to deal with.

Gaston. In Heaven's name, Elfrida!

Wolfram. Gaston, hush!
Let the petitioner finish.

Elfrida. Think, my lord,
What had you done to make him be your king,
Had not the arm of law been on your side?

Wolfram. 'Tis true: he is a rebel. But speak on.

Elfrida. And kingship was a thing he never craved.

Wolfram. And had he craved it, would have put it
off

With twice the resolution to be cross
And spoil the music. Thou hast fathomed him.
Elfrida, thou dost understand this man.

Elfrida. And—Wolfram—me—he wants.

Wolfram (looks from one to the other). Thou noble
creature! Gaston, to your knees,
And thank the Lord for sending you a wife

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

So like you, yet with greater brain behind.
Such virgin power doth stalk about the world;
But we forget it, till some Deborah
Makes men look small. My mother, you must add
Your blessing to the contract. This event
Much sanctifies the issues of the day,
And makes them perfect.

Queen. Gaston and Elfrida,
I give you both, all that is left in me
Of blessing and of joy.

Wolfram (to Ægidius). My lord, ye judges sit to catch the truth.

Here comes it by the handful. Let your clerks
Reduce these mysteries to documents,
And stamp them with the seals of earthly note.
We thank you for your labour. And, Ægidius,
I thank you for your kind and noble soul
That gave truth passage.

Ægidius. 'Tis indeed
The immediate work of God, and Him I thank
That these dim eyes have lived to witness it.
Old king, embrace thy son. 'Tis something late—
Yet not too late—to greet thine eldest born.

(Gaston kneels before the old King.)

Wolfram. Father, take heart; it is predestinate,

ACT THIRD

And should be thus. Thou gavest me thy word,
And hast performed it.

King. Hardly do I hold
The thread of reason. Yet within a mist,
Following a light, I must one further step,
Though it exhaust your patience. Noble sir,

(To Ægidius.)

This boy I do acknowledge as my son,
In such abjection as befits a soul
Finished with earth. And in your hands I place
My abdication, late determined on,
And blessed in the event.

Arnolfo (to the Court). This falls within
The scope of your commission. Please the court
We do accept it.

Pharamond (aside). Those most cunning knaves
Who planned the case have overreached themselves.
This abdication makes the state secure.

But for themselves remains no punishment?

(To Wolfram.)

Wolfram, beseech you, get me the court's ear
For but two words; that I may tell the plot
Between this villain Hincmar and the rest,
And set afoot some vengeance for the crime.

(During Pharamond's speech Hincmar is seen to

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

beckon to Martin and then speak to him. Martin has quietly slipped out; and Hildebrand, observing him, has quietly gone out by another door on the same side of the stage.)

Wolfram. Peace, Pharamond; or else address the king.

But if my counsel shall be sought therein,
I'll say we are as much in debt to Satan,
Being God's agent, as to you or me,
That helped unroll our story. See you not
That this magician with his heartless schemes,
Setting false lights upon a dangerous coast,
Has brought our ship to shore? I greatly thank him.
The greatest villains ever go scot-free
Because men cannot catch them; 't is a sign
That we do wrong to punish lesser men.
'T is not within our duty. Peace, I say.
This wretch will bring his own destruction on
Ere we can plot it.

Enter Hildebrand, dragging in Martin.

Hildebrand. Help, help, King Gaston! If ye will not all be burned in your beds! This fire-bug will roast ye to cinders.

Gaston. What is it, Hildebrand?

Hildebrand. I found him setting fire to all parts and

ACT THIRD

corners of the philosopher's room. Run, some of ye, and see that it is out; for the papers were in a bright blaze before I could reach him. I did only trample them out, and ran back for fear the he devil should escape while his black angel was burning ye.

Gaston. Run, some of you, and put the fire out.

[*Exeunt Servants.*]

Hincmar. It is but private rubbish, good my lord. I bid the boy destroy it.

Gaston.

Ah, you did!

Oswald, arrest the miscreant traitor there
Who would destroy the proofs of his dark work;
And, Otto, run to save each several scrap,
Which being pieced together and well conned,
Together with the intercepted note,
Haply shall form a halter for his neck.
Why, we forgot thee, miserable man!
We thought there was some fire behind thy smoke.
Now we shall know.

Pharamond. Long live King Gaston!

All. Long live King Gaston!

Wolfram. Mother, Prince Ægidius
Waits to receive new welcome at our hands.
Friends, comrades, brothers, let us once again

THE MAID'S FORGIVENESS

Lock hearts together in a long embrace,
And stand brimful of joy to bless this day
That brings to each its own,—the land a king,
The queen a son, and me deliverance.
Then must I leave you; for my sail is set,
My prow is thirsty for the larger sea,
And tugs the cable. I will drink a cup
Of Godspeed to you all, reach down the sword
My father carried in the great Crusade,
And go to find my kingdom.

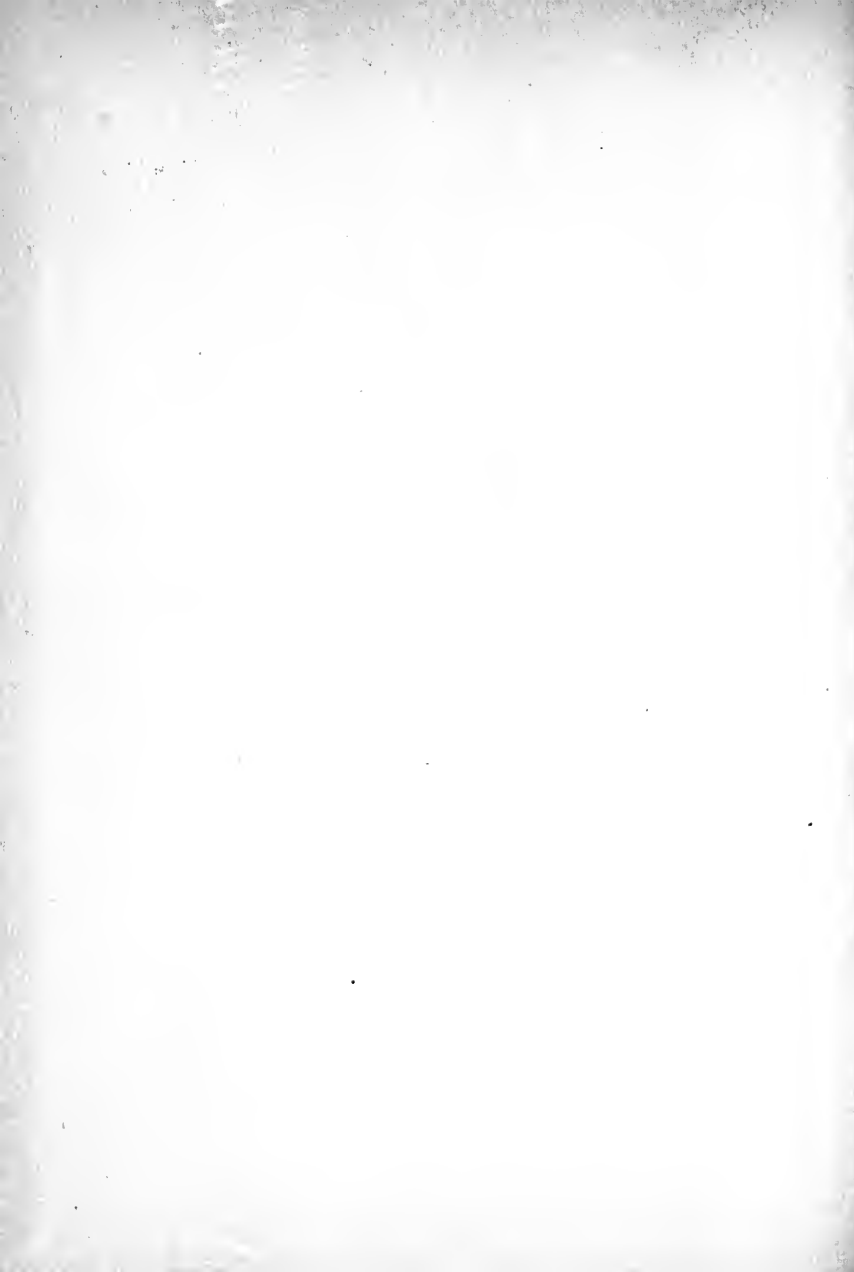
THE END

Tours, January, 1908.

NOTE

This play is designed for a small theatre with very simple accessories, and for rapid and natural acting, like the acting seen in Italian theatres. If the play were to be given in a large theatre or elaborately staged, Act I would probably have to be divided into two acts by a pause after Scene II.





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